

THE MOTIVE OF MALIGNITY:  
A LOOK AT EVIL IN TITUS ANDRONICUS, RICHARD III,  
OTHELLO, KING LEAR, AND THE TEMPEST.

by

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## THE MOTIVE OF EVIL

The occurrence of evil in Shakespearean drama is sometimes as inexplicable as the occurrence of evil in human life. While some of Shakespeare's villains, Richard III, Goneril, Regan, and Tamora might have accomplished their schemes in a less injurious manner, each elected a course of wickedness. Although Iago, Edmund, and Aaron might have profited from their established reputations by remaining faithful to those who trusted them, each proved a betrayer. In all of these cases it is difficult to discern the motives which inspired the malefactors.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge teased future critical curiosity into this problem by claiming that Shakespeare's villains had no motives other than their interest in evil itself. He implied this when he said that Iago's evil intent was "the motive-hunting of a motiveless malignity." Coleridge thus satisfied himself that Iago's villainy was simply a pernicious fixation devoid of rational explanation. Although Coleridge's remark did little to pinpoint the perplexities of Iago's evil nature, it served as a critical challenge to discover the motives of evil in Shakespeare's villains.

Modern critics have accepted Coleridge's challenge by tracing the motives of Shakespeare's villains to a variety of sources. A. C. Bradley, calling Coleridge's remark "misleading," relates the motives of evil to Shakespeare's interest in "the tragic aspect of life, the tragic fact."<sup>1</sup> E. E. Stoll claims

that "Shakespeare naturally seized upon the Vice in the Elizabethan stage villain as the motive force available."<sup>2</sup> J. I. M. Stewart approaches the motive of evil with a Freudian emphasis.<sup>3</sup> Each of these views accounts for the motives of evil in striking but divergent ways. In fact they typify certain critical trends in handling the problem. Stewart is indicative of those who reduce evil acts to recognizable symptoms of abnormal behavior. Stoll typifies a trend which regards villains as conventional types of the Elizabethan stage. Bradley is representative of the school which measures even the most heinous crimes according to a norm of human behavior natural to their perpetrator. Hence the terms "psychologists," "conventionalists," and "naturalists,"<sup>4</sup> are frequently used in referring to these ways of dealing with the motives of evil in Shakespeare's plays.

The crucial question in evaluating these critical analyses is: "How closely do they coincide with Shakespeare's thought regarding villainy and its likely motives?"

This question is merely rhetorical in asking which of these elements, psychological, conventional, or natural, influenced Shakespeare since Shakespeare was undoubtedly inspired by a combination of these factors. However, the question is worthwhile in clarifying critical viewpoints and in determining their relative importance.

The psychologists' method of categorizing evil deeds according to Freudian norms is perhaps the most scientific way of determining character motive. However, it is rather distantly

removed from the probable context of Shakespeare's thought. Thus Shakespeare did not likely regard Iago as the base side of Othello,<sup>5</sup> who engendered a motive of self destruction. Although such a concept might be helpful in linking Shakespeare with a modern expert character analysis, it is of little help in identifying Shakespeare as an Elizabethan.

The conventionalists, on the other hand, by tracing the motives of evil to Elizabethan stage conventions or to conventions of Renaissance thought provide a more acceptable explanation of the motives of villainy as Shakespeare envisioned them.

Prominent among the "stage conventionalists" is Bernard Spivack who holds with Stoll that the villain in drama is simply a survival of the "Vice of the medieval morality play"<sup>6</sup> adapted to an aesthetic, rather than to a homiletic function. Spivack proposes an allegorical view of evil which regards the dramatic villain as the medieval personification of evil, the Vice, adapted to a new role on the Elizabethan stage. Spivack accounts for this "new role" in the following way:

His essential role, behind the moral facade, exists in a professional and artistic dimension that is perpendicular to the morally conventional plot of the plays in which he survived after the dramatic method that created him disappeared from the English stage.<sup>7</sup>

Spivack sees villainy as a medieval representation of evil in a Renaissance guise.

In demonstrating the influence of contemporary drama on Shakespeare, Spivack provides a source for evil's represen-

tation rather than for its causes. He also fails to answer the question, "What made evil interesting to the Elizabethans?" Spivack's solution is inadequate because it provides only a theatrical answer to the question of evil.

The conventionalists who identify evil in Shakespeare's plays with contemporary Renaissance notions offer an answer to the Elizabethans' fascination with evil, even though they may not fully explain its motives. S. L. Bethell, interpreting Othello according to several possible levels of meaning, illustrates the Renaissance way of thinking:

On the social level we have a study of a contemporary problem, the clash between the 'new man' thrown up by certain aspects of Renaissance culture, the atheist-Machiavel with his principle of pure self-interest, and the chivalric type, representing the traditional values of social order and morality.

As Bethell implies, the commonly accepted convention of the evil-doer was the "atheist-Machiavel."

Machiavelli became the byword for villainy in the Renaissance because he seemed completely indifferent to the question of evil in The Prince, and because his contemporaries, especially Gentillet and Patericke,<sup>9</sup> considered his famous dictum, "the end is all that counts," an immoral principle rather than an amoral one. However, Machiavelli was interested only in teaching a lesson of effective government by his indifference to evil. Elsewhere in The Prince he states: "As I have said, so far as he is able, a prince should stick to the path of good but, if the necessity arises, he should know how to follow evil."<sup>10</sup> Machiavelli's choice involves good and evil, but the welfare

of the state is the primary consideration.

The Prince does no more to explain the motive of evil than the Vice convention of the Elizabethan stage. As Mario Praz observes, "What they found in him [Machiavelli] was, as usual, what already existed, since the easiest and commonest way of reading books is to see in them what is already in ourselves."<sup>11</sup> At the same time, Machiavellianism is as clearly a source for the dramatic representation of evil as the Vice. Machiavel speaks the prologue in Marlowe's The Jew of Malta and establishes the Machiavellian villain in the figure of Barabas. In Shakespeare's 3 Henry VI, Richard of Gloucester (later Richard III) says that he could "set the murderous Machiavel to school" (III,ii,193).<sup>12</sup>

Praz states that

Since Machiavellianism had become the common denominator for sins of every description, we will not be surprised in finding not only the Senecan tyrant dressed in the new Florentine garb, but also other old stock characters of drama brought up to date with Machiavellian trimmings.<sup>13</sup>

The method then of tracing evil to some sources available to Shakespeare in which evil had been represented, characterizes both the Machiavellian and the Old Vice approach of the conventionalists.

In accepting the Machiavellian villain as the authentic Renaissance representation of evil, we face the same objection we encountered concerning the Medieval Vice. Although the Machiavellian villain accounts for the Elizabethan interest in the figure of evil and provides a dramatic personification of evil, Machiavellianism does not explain the Elizabethans' idea

of evil's causes. In fact, the conventionalists imply that the Elizabethans were interested in the spectacle of evil rather than in its rationale.

In their appraisal the conventionalists present a striking image of evil, but neither the psychologists nor the conventionalists satisfactorily answer the question of how Shakespeare regarded the motives of evil.

In showing that evil acts are characteristic of the nature that produced them, the naturalists clarify the question of Shakespeare's interest in the motives of evil. By focusing their attention on the nature of man, the naturalists ultimately trace the basis of villainy to the human will, man's power to choose.

A. C. Bradley suggests this fundamental tenet when he conjectures that Shakespeare's interest in the existence of evil was based on two facts:

The first of these is the fact that perfectly sane people exist in whom fellow-feeling of any kind is so weak that an almost absolute egoism becomes possible to them, and with it those hard vices--such as ingratitude and cruelty--which to Shakespeare were far the worst. The second is that such evil is compatible, and even appears to ally itself easily, with exceptional powers of will and intellect.<sup>14</sup>

Bradley thus sees Shakespeare's villain as a paradox associating an exceptional mind with motives bent on evil. But he further points out that such an alliance is not at all incongruous.

Lily B. Campbell develops the idea that evil motives are rooted in man's nature by treating the question in the frame of her basic premise that in Elizabethan thought man's acts were largely the products of passion:



It is thus that the villain is defined. Will is directed to the gaining of ends set by passion and judged by reason. The passion which escapes reason and leads men on to their destruction is the passion which marks the tragic hero. But the passion which sets the ends and has the means judged by reason is the passion which we have already seen is mortal sin. And such is the passion that has brought the judgment and the will into its service in Iago and in the other villains.<sup>15</sup>

Although Miss Campbell thinks of passion as the essential force of evil, she distinguishes the passionate hero from the passionate villain by the degree of deliberateness of their acts. The passionate hero is the victim of his emotions while the passionate villain calculates all his purposes. Thus the villain's rationally governed will contributes to the maliciousness of his acts. Therefore, the villain is not the victim of passion as is the hero, but rather he is guilty of the passion with which his intellect and will concur. Miss Campbell infers that man's intellectually regulated will is as important a force in producing evil deeds as the passion which prompts them.

Ruth Anderson phrases the naturalist argument most succinctly by observing that,

This "most exquisite" piece of human nature, will, then, is subject to a depravity which extends itself to all the forces of man.<sup>16</sup>

In these few words Miss Anderson points out that man sees evil and embraces it because his will is degenerate. Thus she rightly focuses attention on the importance of Bradley's, Campbell's and similar naturalists' thought by emphasizing that the human will is the fountainhead of man's evil motives and the deeds which they inspire.

The naturalists seem better able to explain Shakespeare's notion of the source of evil than the psychologists' Freudian analysis of evil, or the conventionalists' "Old Vice" or "Machiavellian" representation of the archvillain. Even so, the naturalists do not entirely resolve Coleridge's challenge of discovering the patterns of evil in Shakespeare. There appears something of the abstract in reducing the various manifestations of evil to the human will as their ultimate source. Although the will is admittedly the agency of all man's acts, how directly does it inspire the intellect in choosing evil? The human will cannot be regarded as the proximate motive of evil in Shakespeare's villains unless it can be demonstrated that Shakespeare was interested in the dynamic workings of the human will as the principal means of dramatizing the generation of evil.

#### THE WILL TO SIN

The immediate cause of sin, according to Elizabethan thought, was the free will of man. To the Elizabethans there was nothing remote, nothing abstract, about the fact that the same will which made man free was also the instrument of his destruction. In their thinking, man sinned because he willed to sin. This attitude was suggested in nearly every phase of Renaissance thought: Richard Hooker explained the religious implications of free choice; Francis Bacon discussed its philosophical importance; and Machiavelli emphasized its political advantages. These men furnished Shakespeare with a formula which linked the human will to evil as one of the

alternatives man's free nature enjoyed.

According to the orthodox theologian, Richard Hooker, man was bound to the well-ordered world of nature, with an intellect to perceive his responsibilities and a will to execute them. The pattern of man's actions, following that of universal nature, was destined to fulfill man's nature providing he cooperated with the rules governing his being. In 1594 Hooker expressed his idea in the following way:

Wherefore to return to our former intent of discovering the natural way, whereby rules have been found out concerning that goodness wherewith the Will of man ought to be moved in human actions; as every thing naturally and necessarily doth desire the utmost good and greatest perfection wher<sup>of</sup> Nature hath made it capable, even so man.<sup>17</sup>

In Hooker's system man's intellect was equipped to know nature and to inform man's will which was in turn equipped to follow the dictates of intellect.

The presence of evil, Hooker further stated, was due to a deliberate violation of this natural pattern:

For there was never sin committed, wherein a less good was not preferred before a greater, and that wilfully; which cannot be done without the singular disgrace of Nature, and the utter disturbance of that divine order, whereby the preeminence of chiefest acceptation is by the best things worthily challenged.<sup>18</sup>

According to Hooker the perverse human will stands out as the agency of moral evil because it refuses to accept a higher good determined by a superior will.

Francis Bacon, some twenty years later, concurred with Hooker on the question of the will's agency. Bacon, however,

gave a philosophical bent to the question:

The human understanding resembles not a dry light, but admits a tincture of the will and passions, which generate their own system accordingly; for man always believes more readily that which he prefers. . . .in short, his feelings imbue and corrupt his understanding<sup>19</sup> in innumerable and sometimes imperceptible ways.

Thus Bacon illustrated the Renaissance notion that the will is the corrunker of man's nature.

While Hooker and Bacon expressed an orthodox recognition of man's will as the agency of evil, Machiavelli, in The Prince, showed an interest in man's will as the author of his social and political destiny. According to Machiavelli man's will conflicted with norms of action based on law, custom, or self-restraint when individual concern was at stake. Machiavelli maintained:

Nevertheless I believe, if we are to keep our free will, that it may be true that fortune controls half of our actions indeed but allows us the direction of the other half, or almost half.<sup>20</sup>

Machiavelli held that man can assert himself, insuring success, if he tries to cope with fortune and resist its limits. He concluded: "As fortune is variable and men fixed in their ways, men will prosper so long as they are in tune with the times and will fail when they are not."<sup>21</sup> Counter to the orthodox notion which opposes the limits of God's providence to the freedom of man's will, Machiavelli said: "God does not want to do everything for us, so as not to deprive us of free will nor take from us that portion of glory which is ours."<sup>22</sup>

Even though Machiavelli's attitude toward the exercise of



of evil in Renaissance thought. Their emphasis, however, was not on the motive of evil, but on the freedom of man's will. In their outlook evil intrinsically evolved from the human will as an alternative to the motive of doing good.

Shakespeare, following these ideas, may well have been interested in the dynamic workings of the human will as a likely means of dramatizing the generation of evil. No final appraisal of Shakespeare's attitude can be established, however, unless his method of representing villains is examined. A number of these villains, both comic and tragic, lend themselves to such an examination. For illustrating Shakespeare's outlook Titus Andronicus, Richard III, Othello, King Lear, and The Tempest seem particularly relevant.

#### ARCHVILLAINY: AARON AND RICHARD

Shakespeare's first villains, Aaron in Titus Andronicus and Richard in Richard III, are not mere wrongdoers or criminals but monsters of iniquity. Aaron's inflictions on the Andronicus family and Richard's perverse policies compare to Lorenzo's conspiracy in Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy and to Barabas' machinations in Marlowe's The Jew of Malta. Richard and Aaron are conventional archvillains.

As archvillains, Aaron and Richard have in common an interest in the spectacle of wickedness. Each contemplates the fiendishness of his schemes, and each proclaims his intention to excel in iniquity. However, besides their similar entrenchment in evil

Aaron and Richard have little in common. Aaron is a Moorish servant who perpetrates heinous crimes; Richard is an English king who commits appalling tyrannies. Aaron is a demon because his deeds are inhuman; Richard is an ogre because his plots are depraved. Aaron at no time regrets his criminal role; Richard considers, for a moment, the repercussions which his misdeeds have had. Even though both men have a claim to the title of archvillain, the basis of their respective claims differs insofar as their guises are not alike. Aaron's character is that of the medieval Vice, while Richard's is that of a Machiavellian plotter.

Aaron's feats of wickedness in Titus Andronicus reveal him less a depraved person than as a masquerader of sin. He lacks convincing motives in plotting to have Lavinia raped, to have Bassianus murdered, to have Martius and Quintus executed and to trick Titus into mutilating himself, so that his manipulations are more a performance in wrongdoing than the means to any particular end. Aaron's only real aim in the play is to display himself in the most terrifying image of evil that he can personate. In a melodramatic "aside" while he is talking with Titus, Aaron declares:

O, how this villainy  
Doth fat me with the very thoughts of it!  
Let fools do good, and fair men call for grace,  
Aaron will have his soul black like his face.  
(III,i,203-206)

Aaron is more concerned with the exhibitory value of his crimes than with the reasons for committing them.

Aaron, however, presents plausible enough reasons for his actions and his mad behavior. Initially he involves himself

with the revenge plot of his mistress, Tamora, asserting, "Vengeance is in my heart, death in my hand,/ Blood and revenge are hammering in my head" (II,iii,38-39). Later he reveals the substance of his schemes to his enemy, Lucius, in order to protect his bastard infant son. These motives are obvious; they are only Aaron's pretended purposes for his course of action. Given the opportunity to do evil, Aaron abandons this facade of rationalism. He deserts Tamora, his only hope of support, in order to save his son, saying,

My mistress is my mistress; this myself  
The vigour and the picture of my youth.  
This before all the world do I prefer;  
This maugre all the world will I keep safe,  
Or some of you shall smoke for it in Rome.  
(IV,ii,107-111)

Once he has secured Lucius' promise to spare his son, however, Aaron jeopardizes his son's life by capitalizing on the chance to insult Lucius:

If there be devils, would I were a devil,  
To live and burn in everlasting fire,  
So I might have your company in hell  
But to torment you with my bitter tongue!  
(V,i,147-150)

Instead of deriving the benefits of his perverse acts, Aaron wants only to establish his reputation as a villain.

Aaron's real function as a villain ends, in effect, when he departs for the ruined monastery, for from that time he merely suffers the consequences of his previous acts. However, Aaron in no way pretends to be victimized by this turn of events, nor does he remove his mask of villainy. The full scope of his maliciousness is realized only after his capture by Lucius when



Aaron divulges as length the extent of his past crimes. Aaron's avowal of these crimes reveals that his mania far exceeds the present possibilities for evil because his schemes only nourish his desire for further mischief. Thus he flouts Lucius with all his vices:

Even now I curse the day--and yet, I think,  
 Few come within the compass of my curse--  
 Wherein I did not some notorious ill,  
 As kill a man, or else devise his death,  
 Ravish a maid, or plot the way to do it,  
 Accuse some innocent and forswear myself,  
 Set deadly enmity between two friends,  
 Make poor men's cattle break their necks,  
 Set fire on barns and hay-stacks in the night  
 And bid the owners quench them with their tears.  
 Oft have I digg'd up dead men from their graves  
 And set them upright at their dear friends' door,  
 Even when their sorrow almost was forgot;  
 And on their skins, as on the bark of trees,  
 Have with my knife carved in Roman letters,  
 "Let not your sorrow die, though I am dead."  
 [Tut, I have done a thousand dreadful things  
 As willingly as one would kill a fly,  
 And nothing grieves me heartily indeed  
 But that I cannot do ten thousand more.  
 (V,i,124-144)

If there is a possibility that Lucius will release him, Aaron ignores it in order to inscribe his name in the annals of infamy.

Aaron's catalogue of his indiscriminate offences typifies his behaviour rather than characterizes his nature. Just as he loves his son as a reflection of himself, so he projects himself as an image of adversity. When he prays, Aaron invokes the patronage of hell, the source of his villainy:

Some devil whisper curses in mine ear  
 And prompt me, that my tongue may utter forth  
 The venomous malice of my swelling heart!  
 (V,iii,11-13)

Nowhere does he speculate that his will might be the source of

his actions, even though he regards his will as a necessary tool.

Aaron says in his concluding lines,

Ah, why should wrath be mute and fury dumb?  
I am no baby, I, that with base prayers  
I should repent the evils I have done.  
Ten thousand worse than ever yet I did  
Would I perform if I might have my will.  
If one good deed in all my life I did,  
I do repent it from my very soul.  
(V,iii,185-190)

Although Aaron recognizes the importance of his will, he gains inspiration from the wickedness of his deeds rather than from his freedom to act, for he maintains his demoniacal posture beyond his will's ability to assert itself.

Aaron's evil is best explained, perhaps, through the tradition of the medieval Vice. Bernard Spivack observes:

In the archaic stratum of his performance his wickedness is neither acquisitive nor retaliatory; it is demonstrative--a serial exhibition perpetuating the veteran stage image of almost two centuries. His behavior has its absolute meaning in his self-proclaimed villainy--that composite homicidal label which replaces of necessity, the exposition of his name and nature by the Vice of the moralities.<sup>27</sup>

Aaron performs this modified allegorical part throughout Titus Andronicus. Even in his demise, he disregards his impending fate in order to affront his captors--a far cry from Iago's determined silence in Othello. Like Edmund Spenser's Duessa (The Faerie Queene, V,xlix), he seems to portray the notion that evil is never utterly destroyed. In the same fashion that Duessa is brought to terms by Artegall, Justice, Aaron's fate is decreed by Lucius:

[See justice done on Aaron, that damn'd Moor  
 By whom our heavy haps had their beginning.  
 Then, afterwards, to order well the state,  
 That like events may ne'er it ruinate.]  
 (V,iii,201-204)

Justice is the obvious method of coping with the evil which Aaron represents.

Aaron's personification has little to do with the principal action of revenge in the play, but it does intensify evil, making Titus' vindictiveness more explicable. Also it shows the "motiveless malignity" which found acceptance on the Elizabethan stage, the malignity which initiated a spectacle of horror.

Richard's villainy in Richard III follows a very different pattern from Aaron's in Titus Andronicus. Richard's remark that he could "set the murderous Machiavel to school" is an apt one because it indicates the type of villainy which he embraces: the ambition to win the crown and keep it in any way possible. This motive, coupled with the techniques he uses to achieve his end, confirm him as a Machiavellian schemer.

As a Machiavellian villain, Richard's designs follow a conventional pattern instead of a naturalistic one. Unlike Edmund in King Lear, he attributes his course of action to physical deformity rather than to intellectual superiority:

Why, I, in this weak piping time of peace,  
 Have no delight to pass away the time,  
 Unless to see my shadow in the sun  
 And descant on mine own deformity.  
 And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover  
 To entertain these fair well-spoken days,  
 I am determined to prove a villain  
 And hate the idle pleasures of these days.  
 (I,i,24-31)

His determination seems little more than a decision to become a monster in behavior as well as a monster in shape. Thus Richard becomes a type of stage villain with a semblance of evil different from that of Aaron in Titus Andronicus.

Richard acknowledges his role as a typical Machiavellian when in the course of his scheming he alludes to his hypocrisy:

But when I sigh, and with a piece of scripture,  
Tell them that God bids us do good for evil;  
And thus I clothe my naked villainy  
With odd old ends stol'n forth of holy writ,  
And seem a saint when most I play the devil.  
(I,iii,234-238)

A little later he again mentions his hypocrisy, this time drawing an allegorical comparison: "Thus, like the formal Vice, Iniquity/ I moralize two meanings in one word" (III,i,82-83). Following this confession, Richard has only to find suitable opportunities to work his hypocritical imposture.

Richard's hypocritical malice characterizes nearly all his schemes in the play. After he has persuaded Anne (whose husband he has murdered) to marry him, Richard laughingly triumphs:

Was ever woman in this humour woo'd  
Was ever woman in this humour won?  
I'll have her, but I will not keep her long.  
(I,ii,228-230)

While he plans to murder Elizabeth's sons, he decides to marry Elizabeth's daughter:

Murder her brothers and then marry her!  
Uncertain way of gain! But I am in  
So far in blood that sin will pluck on sin!  
Tear-falling pity dwells not in this eye.  
(IV,i,63-66)

After he has won Elizabeth's approval of this suit, Richard secretly denounces her: "Relenting fool, and shallow changing woman" (IV,iv,431). In the same treacherous, hypocritical manner,

Richard executes Hastings on the pretext of Hastings's disloyalty, and dismisses Buckingham, his closest conspirator, because Buckingham balks at Richard's design to assassinate the rightful heirs to the throne, the young Edward and his brother Richard.

In his butchery of the boys, Edward and Richard, Richard III attains his proper distinction as a Machiavellian. This atrocity, more than Richard's previous crimes, has dire effects, because by it Richard destroys the established hierarchical framework of order, and removes any likely hope of deliverance from his tyranny. Thus his crime begets a universal disaster. When Tyrrel, commissioned by Richard to hire the murderers, laments the deed, he also deplores the effect:

The tyrannous and bloody act is done,  
The most arch deed of piteous massacre  
That ever yet this land was guilty of.  
(IV,iii,1-3)

Because of these political (and moral) ramifications, Richard's stature as a villain equals, if not surpasses all former villains of the Elizabethan stage.

Throughout the play Richard is conscious of the hypocritical villainy to which he aspires. However, in all he does, Richard seems oblivious of his own nature as the source of his evil disposition. In only one instance does he regard the will as a possible incentive of evil. When Elizabeth asks him, "Shall I go win my daughter to thy will?" (IV,iv,426) Richard cleverly twists the bent of her question, giving the advantage of gain to her will rather than to his, replying: "And be a happy mother to the deed" (IV,iv,427).

Only at the final moments before battle, after Richard has

seen the ghosts of those whom he has murdered, does he become conscience-stricken and learn, for the moment, that he has betrayed himself. He finally realizes the moral impact of the misdeeds which trouble his conscience:

Alack, I love myself. Wherefore? For any good  
That I myself have done unto myself?  
O, no! alas, I rather hate myself  
For hateful deeds committed by myself!  
I am a villain: yet I lie, I am not.  
Fool, of thyself speak well; fool, do not flatter.  
My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,  
And every tongue brings in a several tale,  
And every tale condemns me for a villain.  
(V,iii,187-195)

After a brief period of time, Richard ceases to be disturbed by this awareness, and he resumes his role, only to become a victim of his opponents in the battle which ensues.

Richard's villainy is not really affected by his conscience, because in the dramatic development of the play he has only implicitly associated evil with his will. He connects villainy with the role he assumes rather than with its cause. Even though Richard III has defied all law, all custom, and every restraint, he does so not to assert his individual will, but to accomplish his design. In this conventional way the monstrosity of his schemes rather than the awfulness of his nature accounts for the real evil in the play.

In the strict sense, Richard is not a successful Machiavellian, for he is unable to retain his crown. He fails to heed the words of Machiavelli, "As fortune is variable and men fixed in their ways, men will prosper so long as they are in tune with the times and will fail when they are not."<sup>28</sup> Richard does not keep "in tune with the times" because his hypocritical villainy becomes too

obvious a display of malignity, and he consequently incurs the wrath of his subjects. Richard is, nonetheless, an effective evildoer because he fulfills a conventional role in a unique way. Unlike Aaron, Richard repents his deplorable ways for an instant, thus revealing the momentary dilemma of his conscience. This adds a significant dimension to his performance as a masterful wrongdoer, for it draws attention to Richard's character rather than to the spectacle of evil alone.

Essentially the motives of malignity for Richard and for Aaron in Richard III and in Titus Andronicus rest on their roles as typical archvillains rather than on any personal involvement with evil. Aaron offers pretexts for his schemes, but his actual resolve is to typify sin. Richard seems induced to evil by his desire to be king, but he only acts the part of a hypocritical plotter so that he can succeed to the role of tyrannical ruler. In this way, Richard and Aaron account for the inexplicable presence of evil by appearing in the recognizable guises of the medieval Vice and the Machiavellian intriguer.

Thus in his early plays, Shakespeare appears to have been engaged with the problem of effectively representing evil rather than with that of delineating its motives. However, Aaron and Richard constitute only the initial stage of development in Shakespeare's career as a dramatist. In two of his mature plays, Othello and King Lear, Shakespeare depicted extremities of evil similar to those of his early plays, but he put a proportionate emphasis on the natures of the characters that contrived them. Consequently, he was able to evince the motives as well as the methods of malignity.

## VOLUNTARISM: IAGO AND EDMUND

Iago in Othello and Edmund in King Lear are no less villainous than their forerunners, Aaron in Titus Andronicus and Richard in Richard III. With a dispassionate efficiency, Iago designs the murder of Cassio, poisons the mind of Othello, and expediently kills his associate, Roderigo, and his own wife, Emilia. In the same manner, Edmund falsely incriminates his brother, Edgar, betrays his father, Gloucester, dupes Goneril and Regan, and orders the deaths of Lear and Cordelia. Both Iago and Edmund profess their wickedness; both boast of their cunning. Unlike Aaron and Richard, however, Iago and Edmund are not mere functionaries of evil, arch-villains who account for the otherwise inexplicable presence of evil in the world. Rather, they are exhibitionists who exalt their freedom to do wrong, their power to choose, triumphing in the perversity of their deeds. Thus, Iago and Edmund are self-centered voluntarists rather than conventional intriguers.

Iago has a notion of voluntarism which is uncompromising; that is, the motives of his actions begin and end with his force of will. Thus when he is finally brought to bay, Iago concludes his plot by resolving to remain silent instead of justifying himself to his captors. Edmund's notion of voluntarism, however, is compromising; the motives of his actions depend on other factors besides his own force of will. When he is apprehended, Edmund makes a futile effort to undo the wrong he has done by revealing that he has ordered the murders of Lear and Cordelia. Edmund's attitude differs from that of Iago because Iago is the sole perpetrator of evil in Othello



(using Roderigo only as a tool), while Edmund is a conspirator whose success depends on that of Goneril and Regan. In this way, King Lear is an extension of the theme of voluntarism developed in Othello.

Iago's is not the only expression of the importance of the human will in Othello. Although Iago manifests the will's attraction to evil, Desdemona illustrates the will's preference for good. Desdemona's virtue and Iago's vice are objects of the will depicting the conflict in man's free choice.

Desdemona is characterized as a dutiful, submissive wife. Early in the play she recognizes her natural responsibility to Othello and its precedence over her paternal obligation. She informs her father, Brabantio:

But here's my husband;  
And so much duty as my mother show'd  
To you, preferring you before her father,  
So much I challenge that I may profess  
Due to the Moor, my lord.  
(I,iii,185-188)

The principal crisis which confronts Desdemona is whether she can sustain her professed loyalty in the face of Othello's wrath. This crisis is presented and resolved through decisions of her will.

In only one instance does Desdemona fail to acquiesce to her husband's will. When Othello demands that she produce the lost handkerchief, Desdemona lies, "Why, so I can[sir], but I will not now" (III,iv,86). Although Desdemona uses a pretext to conceal her embarrassment, her refusal is so foreign to her behavior, that Othello is convinced that she has been unfaithful to him. Elsewhere in the play, however, Desdemona resolves to direct her will

in accordance with Othello's. She asks him, "My lord, what is your will" (IV,ii,22)? "What is your pleasure" (IV,ii,24)? And when Othello begins to accuse her of infidelity, she affirms to Emilia and Iago:

If e'er my will did trespass 'gainst his love,  
 Either in discourse of thought or actual deed,  
 . . . . .  
 Comfort forswear me!  
 (IV,ii,152-153,159)

Even on her deathbed, as Othello is preparing to kill her, Desdemona answers Othello's command to be quiet with the compliance, "I will so" (V,ii,48).

Desdemona's obedience does not reveal her as a weak character by any means. In pleading Cassio's cause, she resists Othello's temper in order to recommend Cassio's merits. When she at first fails, she encourages Cassio to have faith in her will:

What I can do I will; and more I will  
 Than for myself I dare. Let that suffice you.  
 (III,iv,130-131)

It is because of her persistence that Desdemona easily falls victim to Iago's will.

Desdemona's will, represented by her loyalty to Othello and by her kindness to Cassio, discovers the power of her virtue to assert itself in the most adverse circumstances. In fact, her constancy is far more a feat of determination than Iago's faithlessness. Nonetheless, Desdemona's innocence is defeated by Iago's evil ways.

To a certain extent Iago seems very conventional as a villain. Like Richard III he plays the role of the hypocrite so that he is known as "honest Iago." Like Aaron he alludes to his demonic

posture, calling himself a "Divinity of hell" and referring to his villainy as the part played by a devil:

When devils will the blackest sins put on  
They do suggest at first with heavenly shows  
As I do now.  
(II,iii,357-359)

Despite the fact that these images help to characterize Iago vividly, they do not supply the primary impetus of his villainy. Iago merely shows that he is aware of his depravity which he deliberately furthers by the mastery of his will.

Iago's knowledge of himself, his view of his own importance, is the basis of his self-assertiveness. In the opening lines of the play he tells Roderigo:

Three great ones of the city  
In personal suit to make me his lieutenant,  
Off-capp'd to him; and, by the faith of man,  
I know my price; I am worth no worse a place.  
(I,i,8-11)

However, Othello deprives Iago of the coveted lieutenantcy, and Iago must look for another means of establishing his worth. For this reason Iago sets out to prove himself a master schemer in order to vindicate himself against Othello who has ignored his competence, treating him as a mere trusted "ancient." The suggestion of an affair between his wife and Othello increases Iago's provocation, and provides him with the assurance he needs to launch a malicious plot. In order to prove his talents and recompense his injured pride, Iago decides to discountenance Othello by causing him to suspect Desdemona's fidelity.

Iago confirms his estimation of his own worth and develops his plot by informing Roderigo that he serves only himself:

For, sir,  
 It is sure as you are Roderigo,  
 Were I the Moor, I would not be Iago.  
 In following him, I follow but myself;  
 Heaven is my judge, not I for love and duty,  
 But seeming so, for my peculiar end.  
 (I,i,55-60)

Later, in a similar vein, Iago tells Roderigo:

I have look'd upon the world  
 for four times seven years; and since I could dis-  
 tinguish betwixt a benefit and an injury, I never  
 found man that knew how to love himself.  
 (I,iii,312-315)

By these avowals Iago fixes his will to well-defined aims, determining them by self-devotion.

Pride in his superior aptitudes, unexpected humiliation by Othello, and resolve to satisfy only his desires, explain Iago's determination to achieve independence of stature by executing a scheme of his own making. Furthermore these traits account for his choice of a pernicious scheme in punishing Othello so that he can demonstrate the tenacity of will which true self-sufficiency requires. Iago manifests these intentions by frequently reflecting on the importance of his will in effecting his evil ends.

It is not surprising to see Iago take a seemingly orthodox view of the value of the will in governing man's behavior. Thus concerning Roderigo's passion for Desdemona, Iago quips, "It is merely a lust of the blood and a permission of the will" (I,iii,330-340). However, in the context of Iago's exaggerated belief in the will's power and remembering that Iago's motives have their sole basis in his self-aggrandizement, Iago's view seems like a self-justification and an opportunity to reject the restraints of any higher power. In this way Iago is able to justify his assertive

will:

Virtue! a fig! 'tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus. Our bodies are our gardens, to the which our wills are gardeners: so that if we will plant nettles or sow lettuce, set hyssop and weed thyme, supply it with one gender of herbs or distract it with many, either to have it sterile with idleness or manured with industry, why, the power and corrigible authority of this lies in our wills. If the balance of our lives had not one scale of reason to poise another of sensuality, the blood and baseness of our natures would conduct us to most preposterous conclusions; but we have reason to cool our raging motions, our carnal stings, our unbitted lusts, whereof I take this that you call love to be a sect or scion.  
(I,iii,322-337)

Observing that his will is the key to freedom from base restraints, Iago seizes on it as a liberating principle from all restraint. In this vein he uses the conventional image of a gardener, often associated with God, the gardener of the world, to delineate the will's primacy.

Just as he repudiates the influence of passions, Iago disclaims ethical limits to man's wilfulness. He mocks Desdemona's idea of rectitude, calling it only another means by which a clever woman might gain her will:

She that being ang'red, her revenge being high,  
Bade her wrong stay and her displeasure fly;  
She that in wisdom never was so frail  
To change the cod's head for the salmon's tail;  
She that could think and ne'er disclose her mind,  
See suitors following and not look behind,  
She was a wight, if ever such wights were,--  
Des. To do what?  
Iago. To suckle fools and chronicle small beer.  
(II,i,149-161)

Iago's contrast to Desdemona is complete at this point: Desdemona's is a submissive will based on a dedicated love and a knowledge of

virtue, Iago's a domineering, contriving will based only on the knowledge and acceptance of himself.

It is ironical that Iago denies all limits threatening the ascendancy of his will, for in so doing he fails to overcome the one major obstacle to his freedom of choice. Iago is so involved with his own image that he is unable to transcend the motives to which he binds himself. His very commitment to evil exhausts the potency which he craves. Thus after Iago has destroyed Othello and comes in direct conflict with the state, he is helpless. The only willful act he can perform is that of silence:

Demand me nothing; what you know, you know.  
From this time forth I never will speak word.  
(V,ii,303-304)

Although he intends this as his final choice, Iago is no longer in the secure frame of reference where his will presides. Gratiano replies, "Torments will ope your lips" (V,ii,305), and Lodovico concludes the play:

To you, Lord Governor,  
Remains the censure of this hellish villain;  
The time, the place, the torture. O enforce it!  
(V,ii,367-369)

In the final moments of his triumph, after Roderigo, Emilia, Desdemona, and Othello are dead, Iago's will is thwarted by the very scheme of evil which he has contrived so that his will might prevail.

Iago's identification of will with his program of evil, which contrasts with Desdemona's alignment of will with her course of virtue, best explains the complexities of motive in Iago. For this reason, Iago is less a conventional stage villain than a villain representative of Renaissance thought. Theodore Spencer rightly

contends:

Shakespeare's vision of evil probed very deep when he conceived Iago, for the frightening thing about Iago, as I have said, is that from one point of view he represents the Renaissance ideal of the man whose reason controls his passions, and yet he is wholly bad.<sup>29</sup>

Iago's badness totally distorts the Renaissance ideal, which Iago might have exemplified by the persistence of his inflexible will.

Iago delivers the most valid account of his will in accusing Desdemona of disloyalty to Othello:

Not to affect many proposed matches  
Of her own clime, complexion, and degree,  
Whereto we see in all things nature tends--  
Foh! one may smell in such, a will most rank,  
Foul disproportions, thoughts unnatural.  
(III,iii,229-233)

Although this is an obvious misrepresentation of Desdemona's will, it is a precise characterization of Iago's will which subverts its own proper "clime, complexion, and degree." Unconsciously, Iago pronounces the reason why his will founders; like the will of Richard III, Iago's will is "out of tune with the times."

Edmund in King Lear does not satisfy his will by devising and evil design, as Iago does, only to be later confounded by the empowered arbiters of human justice. Rather, he gratifies his will by asserting himself as the manipulator of human justice. Although Edmund is the principal villain in this plot, he is indebted to Lear, Regan, and Goneril for its inception.

Even though Lear's scheme to divide his kingdom is seemingly well-intentioned, it is obviously tainted by his wilful tactics. He first proclaims his authority:

We have this hour a constant will to publish  
 Our daughters' several dowers, that future strife  
 May be prevented now.  
 (I,i,44-46)

Next Lear requires a pledge of love from his daughters to insure their perpetual loyalty. When Cordelia balks at his plan and refuses to "heave/ My heart into my mouth" (I,i,93-94), Lear angrily imposes his authority and refuses Cordelia her just patrimony. When Kent tries to assuage Lear's anger, Lear banishes him from the kingdom:

Five days we do allot thee, for provision  
 To shield thee from disasters of the world;  
 And on the sixth to turn thy hated back  
 Upon our kingdom.  
 (I,i,176-179)

In relinquishing his authority, Lear intends to preserve his influence and his prestige: "Only we shall retain/ The name and all the addition to a king" (I,i,137-138). He resigns his legal power so that his subjects must pander to his whims rather than submit to his sovereignty. When Cordelia and Kent refuse to accept this disposition, Lear exiles them as threats to his security.

Although Goneril and Regan encourage Lear to divide the kingdom between them, they quickly indulge their own wilful inclinations once they are in power. Together they conspire to eliminate Lear's prerogatives and to defeat Cordelia and the French army. Regan mockingly tells Gloucester, who pleads Lear's cause,

O, sir, to wilful men,  
 The injuries that they themselves procure  
 Must be their schoolmasters.  
 (II,iv,305-307)

Regan subdues Lear's resolve in order to augment her own prepotency. On the other hand, Goneril abuses her husband, Albany, for his lack of determination: "Milk-liver'd man!/ That bear'st a cheek for blows, and head for wrongs" (IV,ii,50-51). Both Goneril and Regan



trust in preclusive wills as safeguards against possible injuries.

The greatest threat to the plots of either Goneril or Regan is the unmitigated wilfulness of the other. Forced into a mutual alliance, each is nevertheless bent on destroying the other, in order to control the affairs of state exclusively. Each courts Edmund as a likely collaborator to this end. In a plot to fulfill her purpose by first murdering Albany, Goneril solicits Edmund's help. In a letter to Edmund she writes:

Let our reciprocal vows be rememb'red. You have many opportunities to cut him off; if your will want not, time and place will be fruitfully offer'd. There is nothing done, if he return the conqueror; then am I the prisoner, and his bed my gaol; from the loathed warmth whereof deliver me, and supply the place of your labour.  
(IV,vi,267-274)

Edgar, who has intercepted this correspondence, exclaims fitly:

"O indistinguish'd space of woman's will!" (IV,vi,278)

Regan's wish to marry Edmund is granted by the timely death of her husband, Cornwall, who is wounded at the hands of a rebellious servant. When Goneril learns that the widowed Regan intends to thwart her, she bluntly asks Regan in the presence of Albany, "Mean you to enjoy him?" (V,iii,78). Albany interposes, "The let-alone lies not in your good will" (V,iii,79). Goneril proves that the "let-alone" does lie in her will, however, for in her disappointment she poisons Regan and stabs herself.

Lear in his rash wilfulness and Goneril and Regan in their blind wilfulness alter the course of natural destiny. Edmund depends on their power to do this, for he purposes to exploit their authority in order to control destiny by his will.

Edmund discounts the influence of destiny in regulating his acts. Although he is a bastard, he disallows any effect of the "stars" on his evil actions, attributing his villainy rather to his will:

My father compounded with my  
mother under the dragon's tail, and my nativity  
was under Ursa major; so that it follows, I am  
rough and lecherous. Fut, I should have been  
that I am, had the maidenliest star in the  
firmament twinkled on my bastardizing.  
(I,ii,139-145)

Edmund's words echo Iago's phrase, "'tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus" (I,iii,322). However, Edmund does not posit his will as the sole basis of his actions. Rather, Edmund justifies his actions by claiming his will as an agency of nature in opposition to the uncertain dealings of fate:

Thou, Nature, art my goddess; to thy law  
My services are bound. Wherefore should I  
Stand in the plague of custom, and permit  
The curiosity of nations to deprive me,  
For that I am some twelve or fourteen moonshines  
Lag of a brother? Why bastard? Wherefore base?  
When my dimensions are as well compact,  
My mind as generous, and my shape as true,  
As honest madam's issue? Why brand they us  
With base? with baseness? bastardy? base, base?  
Who, in the lusty stealth of nature, take  
More composition and fierce quality  
Than doth, within a dull, stale, tired bed,  
Go to the creating a whole tribe of fops,  
Got 'tween asleep and wake? Well then  
Legitimate Edgar, I must have your land.  
(I,ii,1-16)

Although Edmund here professes to follow nature, he recognizes none of nature's restraints. By "nature" Edmund does not mean natural law, but his own nature of which his will is the agency. In this way Edmund exemplifies Hiram Haydn's remark:

It should be immediately apparent, . . . that the Counter-Renaissance's interpretation of sequere naturam as following the bent of one's own nature would be a subversive individualistic-naturalistic one.<sup>30</sup>

Edmund's justification of his will as an agency of nature is a substitution of the cult of self for the ideal of nature which he presumes to serve. Edmund is less a bastard of birth than one of will.

Edmund creates the frame of self-interest in which his will presides by systematically subverting each phase of the natural order to which he is bound. First, he breaks fraternal affiliation in order to supplant the birthright of his brother, Edgar:

A credulous father and a brother noble,  
Whose nature is so far from doing harms  
That he suspects none; on whose foolish honesty  
My practices ride easy. I see the business.  
Let me, if not by birth, have lands by wit:  
All with me's meet that I can fashion fit.  
(I,ii,195-200)

To this end Edmund falsely accuses Edgar of plotting against their father, Gloucester. Next Edmund betrays his paternal obligation by informing Cornwall of Gloucester's loyalty to Lear, asserting:

I will persevere in my course of loyalty, though the  
Conflict be sore between that and my blood.  
(III,v,23-24)

In this way he gains his father's dukedom. Edmund then proves an unfaithful lover, alternately pretending his affections to Goneril and to Regan while pledging his support against the other:

To both these sisters have I sworn my love;  
Each jealous of the other as the stung  
Are of the adder. Which of them shall I take?  
(V,i,55-57)

Edmund suspends his decision, keeping the usefulness of each in the balance. Finally Edmund becomes a traitor by formulating

his plot to murder the king:

As for the mercy  
Which he intends to Lear and to Cordelia,  
The battle done, and they within our power,  
Shall never see his pardon; for my state  
Stands on me to defend, not to debate.  
(V,i,65-69)

Thus Edmund progresses in the hierarchy of order, structuring his advance on the exploitation of each successive natural affection. In this way Edmund plots to be king, in order to procure the lawful authority to alter events according to his will, as Lear, Goneril, and Regan have done.

Edmund's design miscarries because in its enactment Edmund destroys the basis of authority needed to insure its success. By overthrowing just restraints, Edmund sets a precedent enabling others' wills to contravene his own. Just as Lear is humbled by his wilful daughters, and just as Goneril and Regan are confounded by each other, so Edmund is defeated by Albany, Kent, and Edgar, who reaffirm lawful authority. Finally Edmund is brought to recognize a force of destiny not determined by his will, for after he is wounded by Edgar, he asks, "But what art thou/ That hast this fortune on me?" (V,ii,164). Learning Edgar's identity, he accepts the influence of fate: "The wheel is come full circle; I am here" (V,ii,174). Thus Edmund abandons his belief in the autonomy of will.

The subjection of Edmund's will by his enemies resembles, in a sense, the discipline of Lear's will by his daughters and by a storm. Lear is forced to temper his will so that when Goneril or Regan mistreat him, he learns to be patient:

I'll forbear;  
And am fallen out with my more headier will,

To take the indispos'd and sickly fit  
 For the sound man.  
 (II,iv,110-114)

Likewise, in the tempest Lear is compelled to curb his will completely and to accept his fate. Standing in the midst of a storm he says: "No, I will be the pattern of all patience; I will say nothing" (III,ii,37). In somewhat the same manner, Edmund realizes that his will is cornered by fate, and that he must attempt to reconcile it to the course of just destiny:

I pant for life. Some good I mean to do,  
 Despite of mine own nature.  
 (V,iii,243-244)

Thus he tries to prevent the murders of Lear and Cordelia which he has ordered. Ironically, the success of his attempt is foiled by the despot, time, and Edmund falls victim to his own destiny, death.

Edmund's attempt to save Lear and Cordelia is not a triumph of will over self-interests for his gesture requires no personal renunciation of private welfare. Rather, Edmund tries to "keep in tune with the times" in an effort to improve his situation: "I pant for life" (V,iii,243). But Edmund's resolve at least suggests the alternative of repressing his assertiveness as a surer means of demonstrating power of will than by perverting justice. Shorn of his estimation of personal worth, Edmund comes to realize that self-containment costs more determination of will than a pageant of evil or a command of destiny.

Although Edmund does not regulate his will, he ultimately recognizes its limitations. His ineffectuality, his inability to certify his will against the current of fate, is expressed aptly

by Edgar who observes:

The gods are just and of our pleasant vices,  
Make instruments to plague us.  
(V,iii,170-171)

When Edmund's death is soon after announced by a messenger, Albany indifferently says, "That's but a trifle here--" (V,iii,295). His remark is a fitting epithet to Edmund's will.

In performing their roles as evildoers in Othello and King Lear, Iago and Edmund are not dedicated to the principle of wickedness, but to their power of choice. Iago in his program of evil, and Edmund in his evil-oriented control of destiny, use evil as a means of instating their wills, rather than as a way of typifying villainy. In reducing the causes of evil to a human agency, the will, Iago and Edmund account for the motives as well as the methods of malignity. Although the methods of iniquity are basically the same for Aaron, Richard III, Iago, and Edmund, the existence of evil in Othello and King Lear is no longer explained through the guises of the medieval Vice or the Machiavellian intriguer, but through improper choices made by Iago and Edmund to demonstrate the power of their wills.

Shakespeare's interest in the human will as a means of effectively dramatizing the generation of evil is thus clearly illustrated in Othello and King Lear. Besides representing abstract evil through heinous deeds, as in Titus Andronicus and Richard III, Shakespeare, in Othello and King Lear, renders evil a threatening reality by tracing its roots to human nature. In this way, Shakespeare is able to make his villains more frightening, if only because they are more human. Shakespeare's interest in the dramatic possibilities

of the will's choice between good and evil does not abate with his villains, however. In The Tempest Shakespeare draws Prospero in heroic dimensions by focusing on his will's ability to triumph in this conflict of choice.

#### IDEALISTIC VOLUNTARISM: PROSPERO

Prospero's motives in The Tempest are nearly as elusive for critics as the "motiveless malignity" of Shakespeare's villains. Although Prospero harbors an obvious motive of revenge for wrongs suffered at the hands of his brother, Antonio, and although he has power to work his revenge, he resolutely refuses to do so. For this reason, some critics interpret Prospero's role as symbolic rather than naturalistic. G. Wilson Knight says of Prospero:

He cannot be expected to do more than typify:  
there is not time; and, as a person, he is,  
no doubt, less warm, less richly human, than  
most of his poetic ancestors.<sup>31</sup>

As an explanation of Prospero's strength of will Knight's view is unsatisfactory. In the same fashion that Iago and Edmund choose evil to establish their wills over others, Prospero embraces virtue to assert his will over his passions.

It is not easy to imagine that a passionate conflict could disturb Prospero's composure in The Tempest, for unlike Iago and Edmund, Prospero gives the impression that he controls every dimension of his world. At the beginning of the play, Miranda introduces her father by acknowledging his control over nature:

If by your art, my dearest father, you have

Put the wild waters in this roar, allay them.  
 The sky, it seems, would pour down stinking pitch,  
 But that the sea, mounting to th' welkin's cheek,  
 Dashes the fire out.  
 (I,ii,1-5)

Prospero's relinquishment of his powers at the end of the play recalls his dominance over nature in an even more striking manner:

To the dread rattling thunder  
 Have I given fire, and rifted Jove's stout oak  
 With his own bolt; the strong-bas'd promontory  
 Have I made shake, and by the spurs pluck'd up  
 The pine and cedar; graves at my command  
 Have wak'd their sleepers, op'd and let 'em forth  
 By my so potent art.  
 (V,i,44-50)

Impressive as it is, nevertheless, Prospero's mastery over the natural elements is only one aspect of his controlling power. He is also lord of the baser and higher forms of life, the animal, Caliban, and the spirit, Ariel.

With a god-like wrath Prospero frightens his slaves Ariel and Caliban into obeying his commands. Early in the play he cautions Ariel:

If thou more murmur'st, I will rend an oak  
 And peg thee in his knott entrails till  
 Thou hast howl'd away twelve winters.  
 (I,ii,294-296)

Likewise he threatens Caliban:

If thou neglect'st or dost unwillingly  
 What I command, I'll rack thee with old cramps,  
 Fill all thy bones with aches, make thee roar  
 That beasts shall tremble at thy din.  
 (I,ii,368-371)

Prospero's threats are sufficient to dissuade Ariel and Caliban from rebelliousness and insure their cooperation. In commanding both the elements of nature and his unruly servants, Prospero imposes his will absolutely.



Through these energies under his direct control Prospero extends his influence into the lives of other humans. With Ariel's obedient assistance he manipulates the fate of his enemies, bringing them to his island and controlling their every move. None of their schemes escape his notice, and, like the other pawns of Prospero's world, they are completely at his mercy. Even the noble Ferdinand is compelled to work like Caliban so that Prospero can accomplish his designs. All phases of life around Prospero, whether relating to time, place, or action, are subservient to his will. In this way, Prospero employs powers under his dominion to rectify past wrongs and insure future accord.

Prospero gives the impression of omnipotence; however, his potency is not unlimited. Early in the play he acknowledges the existence of a greater power, answering Miranda's question of "How came we ashore?" with "By Providence divine" (I,ii,158-159). He owes his survival to his books, the source of his magic, and he prizes them above all other material possessions:

Knowing I loved my books, he furnished me  
From mine own library with volumes that  
I prize above my dukedom.  
(I,ii,166-168)

Prospero is indebted to his daughter's loyalty, for it comes from her love and respect rather than from his wilful authority. In the face of Prospero's pretended displeasure, Miranda reassures Ferdinand:

Be of comfort;  
My father's of a better nature, sir,  
Than he appears by speech. This is unwonted  
Which now came from him.  
(I,ii,496-498)

Even though Prospero appears to rule his affairs despotically, he

is not a god but a magician, and it is not improbable when he is affected by his passions.

Prospero does not expect a passionate surge of anger to arouse him in The Tempest, for he calmly regulates each successive development of action in the play. With complete composure he instructs Miranda of their former grievances, introduces her to Ferdinand, son of his enemy, the King of Naples, and systematically confounds his enemies. However, all does not progress as Prospero intends. Caliban, Trinculo, and Stephano provoke Prospero's patience by their plot to kill him, and Prospero becomes momentarily so discomposed that his behavior is noticed by Ferdinand and Miranda:

Fer. This is strange. Your father's in some passion  
That works him strongly.

Mir. Never till this day  
Saw I him touch'd with anger, so distemper'd.  
(IV,i,142-145)

In a feeble way, Prospero confirms their doubts and excuses his passion:

We are such stuff  
As dreams are made on, and our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep. Sir, I am vex'd,--  
Bear with my weakness--my old brain is troubled.  
Be not disturb'd with my infirmity.  
(IV,i,156-160)

The conflict between Prospero's passion and reason is vivid in these tired words. Old injuries coupled with new offences try his forbearance, and his ever useful powers add weight to his temptation for revenge.

When the moment comes that Prospero must reckon with his enemies his passion has not subsided. However, through his will Prospero subordinates his passion to reason, and in an impassioned

speech he asserts to Ariel:

Hast thou, which art but air, a touch, a feeling  
Of their afflictions, and shall not myself,  
One of their kind, that relish all as sharply  
Passion as they, be kindlier mov'd than thou art?  
Though with their high wrongs I am struck to th' quick,  
Yet with my nobler reason 'gainst my fury  
Do I take part. The rarer action is  
In virtue than in vengeance.  
(V,i,21-28)

Prospero thus uses the force of his passion to serve his will, and his decision becomes not only a judgment, but an affirmation of his basic sympathetic humanity.

Unlike the submissive Desdemona and the recreant Lear, Prospero triumphs through his strength of will. In the speech that follows, Prospero relinquishes his magical powers which have, like his passions, only served his will, and are of no further practical use:

But this rough magic  
I here abjure, and, when I have requir'd  
Some heavenly music, which even now I do,  
To work mine end upon their senses that  
This airy charm is for, I'll break my staff,  
Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,  
And deeper than did ever plummet sound  
I'll drown my book.  
(V,i,50-57)

Through his will, fortified by knowledge rather than by magic, Prospero, one may trust, will establish security in his rule and harmony for his dukedom. Thus, his purpose is achieved, and Prospero reconciles the good order of the world with man's responsibility and abilities to rule. Prospero concludes with a fitting epithet to this concept:

Now my charms are all o'erthrown,  
And what strength I have's mine own,  
Which is most faint.  
(Epilogue, 1-2)

In this way, Prospero is a credible ideal, rather than a recognizable type, of human wilfulness.

Through the import of his will, Prospero answers Machiavelli's, Hooker's, and Bacon's notion that man is able to work out his political, religious, and philosophical destiny in life. Operating according to acknowledged standards of perfection, which Iago and Edmund misunderstand as unreasonable constraints, Prospero is able to exercise perfect power of choice. However, Prospero is not so interested in the power of his will to choose as in the proper choice which his will must elect. Realizing that evil is the only real hindrance to freedom since it implies a limited end, Prospero chooses to follow the path of freedom charted by virtue. Thus, Prospero's role in The Tempest is a logical culmination of Shakespeare's development of the notion of will, man's power to choose. In Othello and King Lear, Shakespeare illustrates the improper emphasis of will exalting its power by choosing evil, while in The Tempest Shakespeare indicates the proper value of will directing its power properly by choosing good.

Shakespeare's characterization of Prospero's will according to commonly accepted Renaissance thought thus provides a final insight for reconciling the conventionalist and naturalist modes of interpreting the motive of malignity. While he uses conventional models of villainy to represent Aaron in Titus Andronicus and Richard in Richard III, Shakespeare uses a naturalist method to depict Iago in Othello and Edmund in King Lear. This method, built on the dynamic power of choosing of the human will, is conventional as well as convincingly natural, and reveals Shakespeare the master playwright that he is.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup>A. C. Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy (repr. London, 1965), intro. xii.
- <sup>2</sup>E. E. Stoll, Shakespeare and Other Masters (Cambridge, England, 1940), p. 246.
- <sup>3</sup>J. I. M. Stewart, Character and Motive in Shakespeare (London, 1949).
- <sup>4</sup>This term should not be confused with deterministic naturalism.
- <sup>5</sup>Stewart, pp. 108-109.
- <sup>6</sup>Bernard Spivack, Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil (New York, 1958), p. 33.
- <sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 55.
- <sup>8</sup>S. L. Bethell, "Shakespeare's Imagery: The Diabolic Images in Othello," SS, (1952), p. 71.
- <sup>9</sup>In his Anti-Machiavel, Gentillet attributes the outrages of the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre to the influence of Machiavelli's The Prince. Patericke translated Gentillet's book into English. See Clarence V. Bover, The Villain as Hero in Elizabethan Tragedy (New York, 1964), pp. 33, 36.
- <sup>10</sup>Niccolo Machiavelli, The Prince (New York, 1947), p. 51.
- <sup>11</sup>Mario Praz, Machiavelli and the Elizabethans (Annual Italian Lecture, 1928).
- <sup>12</sup>William Shakespeare, The Complete Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare, ed. William Allen Neilson and Charles Jarvis Hill (Cambridge, Mass., 1942). All subsequent quotations from Shakespeare are cited from this edition.
- <sup>13</sup>Praz, p. 35.
- <sup>14</sup>Bradley, p. 192.
- <sup>15</sup>Lily B. Campbell, Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes (New York, 1930), p. 137.
- <sup>16</sup>Ruth Anderson, Elizabethan Psychology and Shakespeare's Plays (New York, 1964), p. 137.
- <sup>17</sup>Richard Hooker, The Works of Richard Hooker, arr. John Keble; Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity (1841), p. 225.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 224.

<sup>19</sup>Francis Bacon, Novum Organum, ed. Joseph Devey (New York, 1901), p. 26.

<sup>20</sup>Machiavelli, p. 72.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>23</sup>Francis Bacon, Advancement of Learning (New York, 1901), p. 167.

<sup>24</sup>In The Prince Machiavelli spells out ways in which the prince should assert his will in order to preserve his rule.

<sup>25</sup>Francis Bacon, "Of Cunning," Essays, Civil and Moral (1597), (New York, 1909), p. 62.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>27</sup>Spivack, p. 384.

<sup>28</sup>Machiavelli, p. 75.

<sup>29</sup>Theodore Spencer, Shakespeare and the Nature of Man (New York, 1942), p. 135.

<sup>30</sup>Hiram Haydn, The Counter-Renaissance (New York, 1950), p. 477.

<sup>31</sup>G. Wilson Knight, The Crown of Life (London, 1947), p. 208.

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THE MOTIVE OF MALIGNITY:  
A LOOK AT EVIL IN TITUS ANDRONICUS, RICHARD III,  
OTHELLO, KING LEAR, AND THE TEMPEST.

by

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B. A., Cardinal Glennon College, 1963

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

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The evil motives of Shakespeare's villains are often difficult to explain. Samuel Taylor Coleridge discounted Iago's motives in Othello as "the motive hunting of a motiveless malignity." Modern critics, objecting to Coleridge's remark, have traced the motives of evil to a variety of causes. The psychologists categorize evil motives according to Freudian norms of abnormal behavior--an approach rather distantly removed from the context of Shakespeare's thought. The conventionalists claim conventional villains of the Elizabethan stage (the Vice) or typical Renaissance figures of evil (the Machiavellian villain) as Shakespeare's sources of villainy; they provide only a theatrical explanation of evil's motives. The naturalists measure evil deeds by behavior which is natural to the perpetrator, suggesting the human will as the well-spring of this behavior.

Shakespeare was interested in the human will as the agency of evil. His interest was no doubt influenced by contemporary thought. Richard Hooker explained the religious implications of man's free choice; Francis Bacon discussed its philosophical importance; and Machiavelli considered its political advantages. All three men witnessed the fact that in theory and practice, the human will was the immediate source of evil in Renaissance thought. Shakespeare complemented these ideas by dramatizing the will's choice between good and evil.

In his early plays Shakespeare was engaged in representing evil effectively rather than in delineating its motives. Aaron in Titus Andronicus offers pretexts for his schemes, but his

actual resolve is to typify sin. Richard in Richard III seems induced to evil by his desire to be king, but he only acts the part of a hypocritical plotter so that he can succeed to the role of tyrannical ruler. In this way Richard and Aaron account for the inexplicable presence of evil by appearing in the conventional guises of the medieval Vice and the Machiavellian intriguer.

In his mature plays, Shakespeare depicted extremities of evil similar to those of his early plays, but he put a proportionate emphasis on the nature of the characters that contrived them. Iago in Othello by his program of evil, and Edmund in King Lear by his evil-oriented control of destiny, use evil as a means of instating their wills, rather than as a way of typifying villainy. Shakespeare's interest in the human will as a means of effectively dramatizing the generation of evil is thus clearly illustrated.

Prospero's role in The Tempest is a logical culmination of Shakespeare's development of the notion of will. Operating according to acknowledged standards of perfection, which Iago and Edmund misunderstand as unreasonable constraints, Prospero is able to exercise perfect freedom of choice. Realizing that evil is the only real hindrance to freedom since it implies a limited end, Prospero chooses to follow the path of freedom charted by virtue.

Shakespeare's method of depicting the motives of evil was built on the dynamic workings of the human will. As such it was conventional (answering Machiavelli's, Hooker's, and Bacon's notions) as well as convincingly natural.